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ABSTRACT

This paper explores Luce Irigaray's analysis of gesture in the "praticable" and considers resonances and dissonances between the analytical/conference scene and the pedagogical exchange. Irigaray is a French language philosopher, linguist, and psychoanalyst who uses the French term "praticable" of psychoanalytic practice to mean the conventions and gestures which mark the psychoanalytic setting. The paper attempts to encourage questioning the relation between psychoanalysis and pedagogy, and suggests specific connections that might refocus what is done in writing curriculum theory. Ultimately, the paper argues, curriculum theorizing can be rendered as an in(ter)vention. That is, as it intervenes strategically to transform the pedagogical scene it simultaneously invents new modes of social relations, discourse, and thought. The argument is constructed to suggest that intervention is imbricated with birth, with passageways, and with invention and the importance of curriculum theory's relation to the gesture in pedagogy. The first section of the paper deals with Irigaray's analysis of the praticable and the gesture and identifies three aspects of the gesture: the geography of the pedagogical encounter, the transference, and the theory practice relationship. The second section connects these aspects to pedagogy and curriculum theorizing. (Contains 27 reference notes.) (JB)

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CURRICULUM THEORY AS IN(TER)VENTION: IRIGARAY AND THE GESTURE

Sharon Todd

> ...le fluide subsistant toujours *entre* les substances solides pour les joindre, les ré-unir. Sans intervention des fluides, aucun discours ne *se tiendrait*.[1]
>
> Luce Irigaray

Introduction

The major assumption undergirding this presentation is that curriculum theory as a discursive structure is always already about a scene, a setting - an embodied pedagogical exchange - where meaning is produced and engaged. Curriculum theory presupposes, if not directs, the gestures, bodily movements and roles in this scene of learning. In this sense, it is simultaneously *about* a gestural practice and *is* a gestural practice - curriculum theory/theorizing enacts a double gesture. Look at ourselves. This presentation constitutes a series of gestures, constitutes a form of pedagogy, involving both you and me. It is I who am speaking, offering a production, gesticulating, rendering my text audible to your ears. You, as the non-speaking other are sitting - and one presumes, listening - associating my words with other thoughts and images. After we have all presented you will be expected to ask questions, discuss, and become speakers once again. Together, we enact a familiar series of gestures - we become conference bodies, pedagogically involved, brought together in these few hours by our complementarity. So, when I am referring to a "pedagogical exchange" throughout this paper, it does not only reference the gestures of the "classroom," but of other cultural sites as well, such as this conference hall.

Similarly, Luce Irigaray - philosopher, linguist, psychoanalyst - focuses on what is known in French as the *praticable* of analytic practice - that is, those conventions and gestures which mark the analytic setting. However, for Irigaray, the *praticable* is not merely an applied psychoanalytic theory, but presents us with a new way to reconfigure the theory-practice binary. For Irigaray plays on the connotations that the word *praticable* has - in French - to the theatre. In part, she configures the site and gestural practices of the analytic setting in terms of their dramaticity. The slippage of meanings

here are profound, suggesting that the analytic scene is an instrument of production, a theatre of meaning.[2] Thus Irigaray's use of the *praticable* is not invoked innocently, but resonates with multiplicity and plurality of meaning: it surely is not one.

The purpose of this paper is to explore Irigaray's analysis of gesture in the *praticable* and to listen for resonances/dissonances between this scene - the analytic scene - and the scene with which all curriculum theory must contend: the pedagogical exchange. I draw, in part, upon Elizabeth Hirsch's discussion on Irigaray's praticable for some of the subdivisions presented below in order to explore the nature of gesture in the analytic scene.[3] Through these divisions, I hope to open up a space for questioning the relation between psychoanalysis and pedagogy more generally, and to suggest ways in which specific connections might be fruitful for refocusing what we do in writing curriculum theory. Ultimately, I think that curriculum theorizing, following Irigaray's line of thought, can be rendered as an in(ter)vention. That is, as it intervenes strategically to transform the pedagogical setting, it simultaneously invents new modes of social relations, discourse, and thought. In this vein, I have chosen to place the moment of in(ter)vention between two parenthetical lips, two parenthetical legs, in order to highlight that intervention is imbricated with birth, with passageways, with invention. What I am thereby hoping to achieve is a way of questioning that simultaneously disrupts phallocentric metaphors while motioning to the beyond in order to rethink curriculum theory's relation to the gesture in pedagogy. I do not wish to simply map onto the pedagogical encounter a psychoanalytic model. To do so would be to reduce the differences and complexities of a specifically pedagogical exchange to the mechanics of an analytic situation. However, I do wish to suggest that a psychoanalytic model such as Irigaray's is fruitful for questioning the nature of theory-practice, and the significance of the gesture for curriculum theory/theorizing. Nevertheless, there are recognizable limits to her theory, particularly with respect to her lack of attention to how gesture is encoded differently according to social formations such as race, class, and ethnicity as well as sex. While this will not be the major focus of *this* presentation - which is really part of a larger, on-going work - it is a subtext which needs to be dealt with in examining Irigaray's corpus. As it

stands now, the first part of the paper deals briefly with Irigaray's analysis of the *praticable* and the gesture, while the second part elucidates its connections to pedagogy and curriculum theorizing, highlighting a renewed relation between theory and practice.

Irigaray's Gesture: the *Praticable*

Some opening comments on Irigaray's project are in order so as to better situate her views on gesture and the *praticable*. Irigaray's rather lyrical style (particularly evident in her work from the 70s and 80s), and her focus on sexual difference have been the cause of ire as well as respect among many feminist theorists. The eighties' debate on essentialism often cast Irigaray's work as *either* being expressive of a biological determinism *or* as enacting a strategic essentialism. While this debate remains important for theorizing women's identity and sexuality, it is not my intent here to rehash these arguments. What interests me about Irigaray's work in general, and her work on the *praticable* and gesture in particular, is the emphasis she places on "production," and the way in which she casts production in fluid terms. For Irigaray, the term production does not simply reference the procreative capacities of women, but signals a sense of generation, creation, and invention in terms of social relations. Her writing, as is well known, often uses the fluid as a metaphor, deploying it to unsettle phallocentric discourse. But, to my mind, her real gift lies in conceiving of an *economy* of fluids, an exchange of fluids through which new relations - both between the sexes and between women - can be rethought.[4] For instance, she writes, "Imagined and thought of as a sheath or envelope for man's genitals [*sexe*], women's genitals [*sexe*] put her in a position of reduplicating fluidity that might be, not a loss, but a source-resource of new energies."[5] That the source of new energies, new social relations are "rooted" in fluid goes against the grain of the (phallocentric) commonsensical. Usually, we think of rooting, stemming, and growing in relation to solids, to earth, to the ground. Irigaray's hydroponic metaphor situates growth within an exchange that is not mechanical, but one that emerges out of, and is submerged and immersed in fluid. This privileging of the fluid is not a simple binary reversal. It is a way, as Irigaray puts it in another context, to assure

"the access the two sexes have to culture,"[6] to assure that women have access to a symbolic which is representative of their own specificity, and is not defined in and through patriarchal discursive practices.

Critiquing how psychoanalysis neglects gesture "in favour of what is verbally expressed," Irigaray places gesture at the heart of the *praticable* (at the heart of those conventions which govern analytic practice).[7] First, gesture is integral to the "geography of the analysis" - that is, the placement and movement of bodies in the analytic scene. Secondly, it is also central to the transference, which Irigaray sees as connected to this geography. Thirdly, it has profound implications for the theory-practice relationship. I wish to outline these three aspects in more detail.

1. *Geography of the analysis*. The traditional gesture marking the analytic geography has now been infamously stereotyped: the analysand lies down on a couch, with the analyst seated behind it. "The analyst's body is lacking to the analysand's gaze. And the landmarks reverse themselves: from being face-to-face, right corresponding to left and left to right, there they are one behind the other: left corresponding to left, right to right. As if the analyst and the analysand were looking at themselves in the same mirror?"[8] For Irigaray these *gestural* positions produce the conditions out of which arise the potential for *speaking* positions. The scene is set up for the analysand to remember (lying down),[9] and for the analyst to help the analysand build "his or her house of language."[10] In this "primal" analytic scene, the enacting of smaller gestures cannot be divorced from the discourse, the utterances, which occur during the analysis. For instance, the twisting of rings, the shuffling of feet, are

> far from irrelevant to what he or she is talking about. All of this forms a whole which must be perceived and treated as such. Furthermore, all of this combines with the psychoanalyst's gestures to constitute a whole where the gestures of the one give the lead to the gestures of the other - and of course this dynamic includes instances in which the analysand's gestures determine the analyst's. Often it may be necessary for the psychoanalyst to invent gestures which prevent the economies of the two subjects becoming intricated.[11]

This give and take, or what Irigaray calls a seesawing back and forth[12] characterizes the nondiscursive exchange that makes or breaks discursive communication. Moreover, Irigaray recognizes the centrality of gesture in marking the authoritative and enunciative positions of the participants: "psychoanalytic practice is gesturally quite distinctive, in terms of discursive and communicative practice, in a way which is not neutral."[13] Gesture is not neutral in that, for Irigaray, it exists along an embodied, and therefore sexuate, axis. For instance, "the sexual connotations of lying down are different, depending on whether one is a man or woman."[14] Irigaray is not writing here of woman's "natural" attitude or posture, but is demonstrating that the meaning of asking someone to "lie down" is contingent upon the connotations associated with lying down for each of the sexes in our phallic economy. It is the articulation of the material sexed bodies through culture which determine this sexed difference, not a biological predisposition.

2. *Transference*. In Freudian and Lacanian terms, transference generally alludes to the projection of the analysand's unconscious desire, and the playing out of past problems and fantasies, onto the analyst.[15] The analyst as recipient of these projections enacts a countertransference in response. However, Irigaray proposes an alternative in suggesting that transference is also something beyond this action-reaction formation. For her, the drama of the transference is produced in relation to the gestures (the sexed gestures) of the protagonists, and not only as a result of a prior psychical state initiated by the analysand. Irigaray privileges the present, not only the past, as the condition for the transference. Given that Irigaray believes that the gesture of the one affects the gesture of the other, the transference is from the beginning located in the dynamic between the two (*entre deux*). The starting point of transference is not in the presumption (or fantasy) of a subject who knows, as Lacan elaborates, but in the way gesture between the two participants functions as its source. Paradoxically, Irigaray writes that "within the transference, a certain limit, a certain threshold is never crossed and always transgressed - the porosity of the mucous membranes."[16] I read this as indicating that the transference is that space-time which is indeterminate - it is not entirely a flowing from the analysand (the traditional view of transference) nor is it a flowing into her (the countertransference).

Rather it is a "third space" (to borrow a phrase from Jung), a mucous space, a shared space where each is involved in an exchange with the other. The mucous here is an attempt to symbolize what psychoanalytic discourse has largely - because of its phallocentrism - failed to symbolize. In this sense then, Irigaray suggests that the analyst must constantly reinterpret her/his transference (not countertransference) as it provides the basis on which the analyst gives space-time to the analytic situation, the sapce-time in which s/he listens.[17]

3. *Theory-practice*. With this said, we can see how gesture becomes in and of itself an important aspect of the analytic scene. It is not subordinate to discourse or speech, but is coextensive with and sets the conditions for their possibility. Irigaray rethinks the *praticable* as a productive instrument, wrapping her critique of conventional practices in a promise of something better. Elizabeth Hirsh notes that Irigaray draws out "the revolutionary potential" of the *praticable* which is "capable not only of critique and subversion but also of feminine healing and transformation."[18] Irigaray makes it clear that the *praticable* is not the mere implementation of theoretical ideas, but is a constitutive arrangement, whereby the placement of bodies, and the various gestures of analysis are the actions of a scene, a playing out of roles - roles which are not scripted by theory, but roles which obey a logic of fluid interaction.

The relation of the *praticable* to theory is significant here. For Irigaray offers us an alternative to the conventional divisions/connections between theory and practice. Since the *praticable* involves gesture - both at the level of geography and at the level of transference - it expresses something in excess of psychoanalytic theory. The *praticable* is not about employing or implementing theoretical pronouncements, but about becoming attuned to the way gestures function, not as empirical evidence to support some claim or other, but as part of the discourse on psychoanalysis itself. "To write *on* psychoanalysis always runs the risk of reducing the efficacy of the scene."[19] The scene always contains a residue of gesture. Hirsh rightly, in my view, suggests that for Irigaray psychoanalysis remains an "unfinished discourse."[20]

> Lacan...insisted that the technique of psychoanalysis be anchored in a rigorous theory, and cited clinical experience, in turn, as the proof of this theory. Irigaray, on the other hand, proposes to reopen converse between theory and technique, insisting that neither one *can* be anchored in any single place or discourse - except perhaps, in the interminable vicissitudes of the subject they work to produce.[21]

In this sense, the *praticable* is a form of meaning making which serves to disrupt the coherence of theoretical discourse. It breaks through the hermeticism, the isomorphism which characterizes theoretical texts. In this sense it intervenes. However, it also enables an opening of dialogue between analyst-analysand and theory-practice which resists coherence and closure.[22] Irigaray works to express an "other coherence."[23] In this sense it is invention. As both invention and intervention, I suggest that the fluid signalled by the parenthetical lips in in(ter)vention be invoked to connect these terms in a single category, for to return to the quote with which I opened this presentation, without the intervention of fluid, discourse would not hold together. In(ter)vention gives us a way to conceive these two aspects of Irigaray's work simultaneously.

Curriculum Theorizing and Gesture

At this point, I want to explore briefly the ways in which Irigaray's text can be taken up by - and the questions they raise for - those of us concerned with pedagogy and curriculum. I will do so by revisiting the three aspects of the gesture outlined above: the geography of the pedagogical encounter, the transference, and the theory-practice relation.

First, in terms of geography, how do bodies constitute and produce the possibility for meaning to be engaged in a pedagogical encounter? How do seating arrangements, for instance, shape the speaking positions of the subjects involved? The circular arrangement used often by feminist and critical educators is intended to disrupt conventional hierarchal speaking positions whereby the teacher carries sole authority. However, in de-nuding these bodies, exposing them to face-to-face encounters, we are simultaneously constraining as we open up certain engagements with meaning. My own experience with this particular "geography" has produced a number of effects. At times it

has engendered a silence which must be worked through (not always successfully), and which signifies differently for different members of the class. At other times it has been helpful in creating a sense of community. At yet other times, students speak, but bodies remain turned and focused on the teacher. And while I will continue to play with the fundamental geography of the class, I cannot ever assume that the geography will result in a certain "type" of discourse being produced. For the gesture, and what it signifies for the students, *is part of* the discursive whole. The dialogical openness of the pedagogical encounter cannot be determined by prior theoretical pronouncements. Even theorizing silence as resistance forecloses on the way gesture, and not only the students' perceptions, contribute to this (non)speaking position. Moreover, alluding to Irigaray's suggestion that gesture signifies differently along a sexuate axis, I suggest that gesture also functions according to the representational systems which mark racial, class, and ethnic identities as well as sexual ones. For instance, as bell hooks points out, her specifically black woman's body "is almost always at odds with the existing [university] structure" that has not become accustomed to the presence and physicality of her body.[24] In this sense, black women's bodies have a relation to a history of signification which has denied them adequate and meaningful symbolic representation. How we engage geography is partly dependent on this prior system of signification and representation. Thus gesture as geography suggests that in theorizing about curriculum, there must be an acknowledged gap between what one is advocating and the playing out of bodily gestures in specific contexts.

Secondly, in terms of the transference, Shoshana Felman has looked at the pedagogical encounter from a Lacanian perspective, examining how authority operates through the fantasy of the "subject presumed to know."[25] Whereas Irigaray, as we have seen, by attending to the significance of the present, examines how authority operates through the gestures which inhere in the analytic setting, and not only through the fantasies brought to that setting by the analysand. With respect to the pedagogical encounter, we need to ask ourselves in what ways do the gestures in the class, the conference hall, the theatre, or the cinema, function to produce a merging *entre deux*, while simultaneously providing the context out of which difference *entre deux* is achieved? The space-time

which the analyst creates in the *praticable* can only be limitedly mapped onto a classroom encounter, for the situation in a class is not one-on-one as in the analytic setting, but more often than not one-on-many. Moreover, the purpose of the two encounters is inherently different. Nevertheless, the teacher is perceived to function, by way of her authority, as the creator of the space-time in which students act out their everyday performances at school. (Even more so, perhaps, film is the ultimate creator of a space-time continuum, particularly when viewed in a darkened theatre). Yet another difference between the analytic and pedagogical situation is that transference, as that which grows out of the fluid dynamic between teacher and student, is also contained within a larger vessel, an institution, which, to a large extent, denies the existence of transference, very much unlike the institution of psychoanalysis. However, I propose nonetheless, that part of the teacher-student relation can be rethought in terms of how it involves the transgressing of the mucous membranes. Transference can provoke an engrossment (here I am playing on the French *grossesse* which means pregnancy): student and teacher are wrapped up in each other's own space-time in an amniotic setting sustaining each other in a way quite different from Lacan's Hegelian master-slave.[26] In the class, bodies are inhaled, touched, sensed; they are erotic, sensual, pulsating, and odourous - anyone who has ever taught in a warm classroom can get some sense of what I mean. Resymbolizing the dynamic of teacher-student, for instance, requires acknowledging the way affect, the senses, and gesture are intertwined. I am not advocating any ethics of classroom erotics, but suggesting that, like Irigaray's analyst, we need, as teachers and theorists, to reinterpret our own transference as the condition which allows us to become the space-time in and through which we listen, speak, and write to and with our students.

Finally, what Irigaray's emphasis on gesture and the *praticable* indicates is a renewed theory-practice relation. It is perhaps necessary for curriculum theory to turn to the *praticable*, to *its praticable*: that is, to the significance and strategic potential of the pedagogical encounter. Following Irigaray, curriculum theory is not about capturing a practice within a hermetic system of coherence. Nor can it view practice solely as the empirical field whereby ideas are tested, and narratives are

collected in order to construct *a* truth about *the* pedagogical relation. Instead, turning to the gesture in the pedagogical *praticable* entails recognizing it as a strategic field, one which disrupts those symbolic codes which structure our commonsense (read: often phallocentric, classist, and racist) meaning systems. In proposing curriculum theory as in(ter)vention I am suggesting that we take Irigaray up on her reconceptions of the *praticable* as that which subverts these systems of representation while producing new ones - and that it does so on its own terms, in ways that involve the vicissitudes of the subjects who participate in the pedagogical encounter. This does not mean that attention to political goals, to combatting wider social issues such as poverty, anti-Semitism, misogyny and racism - to name a few - cannot provide a theoretical context from which to interpret or guide the *praticable*. In fact, it is quite otherwise: we need to historicize and conceptualize our bodies, our gestures, in relation to how systems of representation always exclude as they re-present. The point to be made, rather, is that attention to the *praticable* shifts the criteria for which theory is deemed coherent, and that theory must remain an "unfinished discourse." What we can learn from psychoanalysis in general, and Irigaray in particular, is how to dispel the illusion that we as teachers "control" all aspects of the pedagogical encounter; and we need to understand this in order to further elaborate transformative strategies. Instead, by attending to gesture, we can rethink the relation between theory and practice in a way that emphasizes pedagogy as a productive, and not a predictable, scene.

As an ending, I wish to echo one of Irigaray's: "The end of analysis might speak its name thus: 'Let us invent together that which allows us to live in and go on building the world, beginning with this world that is each of us.'"[27] Thus the end is really a new beginning.

NOTES

[1]Luce Irigaray, "Le langage de l'homme," in *Parler n'est jamais neutre* (Paris: Minuit, 1985), 289. "...fluid always subsists *between* solid substances to join them, to re-unite them. Without the intervention of fluids, no discourse would hold together." This article is also translated into English as "The Language of Man," *Cultural Critique* (Fall, 1989): 191-202. For the purposes of this presentation, I have used the original French texts wherever possible, at times making modifications to the translations available in English.

[2]This emphasis on theatre also resonates with Anna O.'s (the famous patient of Freud's colleague Josef Breuer) who described her daydreaming as her "private theatre." The importance of these early hysterics to the development of psychoanalytic theory are not lost on Irigaray.

[3]See Elizabeth Hirsh. "Back in Analysis: How To Do Things with Irigaray." In *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*, ed. Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor, and Margaret Whitford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 285-315. I am particularly indebted to her phrase "geography of analysis" and her discussion on transference and the theory-practice relation, although my own reading differs from hers in that I place greater emphasis on the centrality of corporeality in the analytic scene. Hirsh is more concerned with the analytic scene itself.

[4]Irigaray speaks at length of her goals for social transformation in an interview in *Women Analyze Women*, Elaine Hoffman Baruch and Lucienne J. Serrano, (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 149-164.

[5]Luce Irigaray, "La limite du transfert," in *Parler n'est jamais neutre*, 294; also see "The Limits of the Transference," in *The Irigaray Reader*, Margaret Whitford, ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 106.

[6]Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, transl. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), vi.

[7]Luce Irigaray, "The Gesture in Psychoanalysis," in *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Teresa Brennan (London: Routledge, 1989), 127.

[8]Luce Irigaray, "Le praticable de la scène," in *Parler n'est jamais neutre*, 242.

[9]Irigaray, "Gesture," 128.

[10]Ibid., 129. She acknowledges the Heideggerian reference here.

[11]Ibid., 127.

[12]Irigaray, "Le praticable," 240.

[13]Irigaray, "Gesture," 129.

[14]Ibid.

[15]The term tranference is far more contentious and difficult to pinpoint than I am suggesting here. For now, I am speaking of the general meaning of transference as it occurs in the analytic setting and not the specific ways in which Freud, Lacan and others have dealt with the term quite differently.

[16]Irigaray, "La limite," 302; "The Limits," 113.

[17]Ibid., 304/116.

[18]Hirsh, 285.

[19]Irigaray, "Le praticable," 239.

[20]Hirsh, 300.

[21]Ibid., 302.

[22]Ibid., 300-1.

[23]See Hirsh's discussion of coherence and other-coherence, 300-303.

[24]bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 135.

[25] Shoshana Felman, "Psychoanalysis and Education: Teaching Terminable and Interminable," *Yale French Studies* 63 (1982): 21-44.

[26]I am thinking in particular of elementary education, where the teacher is often a constant presence in the class throughout the day, and where touching is far more commonplace than in secondary or post-secondary education.

[27]Irigaray, "La limite," 304; The Limits, 116.